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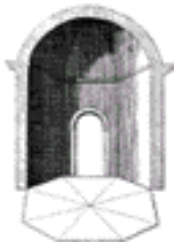

From `Catholicism Against Modernity'

to the Problematic `Modernity of Catholicism'

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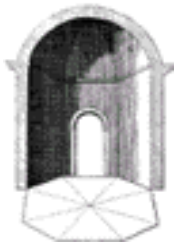
Since the French Revolution the relationship between the Catholic church and modernity has always been very troublesome. First I will describe how the church saw its own position with regard to modernity and how its stance evolved. In a second stage, I will then focus on how modernity `framed' Catholicism: this I will refer to as the modernity and modernization of Catholicism. The insights obtained will be used in a third part in order to get a better understanding of the present and future situation of the church. I will round off with some conclusions concerning Catholic intellectuals and Catholic intellectual traditions from 1800 onwards.

The Catholic Church versus Modernity

In his book *Roman Catholicism: The Search for Relevance*, published in 1980, Bill MacSweeney distinguishes three periods in the church's attitude to modernity: rejection of modernity up to 1878, competition with modernity from 1878 to 1962, from then on a partnership with modernity (MacSweeney, 1980: XIII-XV, 236-239). Twenty years later, with John Paul II's pontificate in mind, I propose adding a fourth period: that of the counter-voice. Let us quickly run through these four periods.

From the time of the French Revolution until 1960, the position of the Catholic church vis-à-vis modernity can be summarized by the word `anti-thesis'. The church condemned modernity for its godlessness, which is understandable knowing that it had been a cornerstone of the Ancien Régime and that, as such, it had experienced a very traumatic period during the French Revolution. What strikes me is the intensity and determination with which the church condemned the new social structure. In harsh words, Gregory XVI's encyclical letter *Mirari vos* (1832) condemned Lamennais's proposals to welcome the new society and its civil liberties as an opportunity for Catholicism. The text states: "At the present moment a brutal malevolence and impudent science, an unrestrained arbitrariness prevail" ("*Alacris exultat improbitas, scientia impudens, dissoluta licentia*" - Gregorius XVI, 1832:6). A couple of decades later, in 1864, Pius IX concluded his *Syllabus Errorum* by condemning the position, from his perspective the acme of all deviations, that "the Pope would have to learn to accept progress, liberalism and modern civilization" ("*Romanus Pontifex potest ac debet cum progressu, cum liberalismo et cum recenti civilitate sese reconciliari et componere*" — Pius IX, 1864, nr. 80). He considered modernity, "present-day civilization" as the result of "criminal plans by malevolent people" ("*nefariis iniquorum hominum molitionibus*" — Pius IX, 1864:1). They had provoked unlawful revolutions against the legal order. From the church's point of view, any form of participation in such a society was fundamentally wrong since its liberties and policies undermined the prominent role of the church in society. This general outlook did not change until Vatican II. It explains the Vatican's weak position toward right-wing dictatorships and its distrust of democratic political systems.

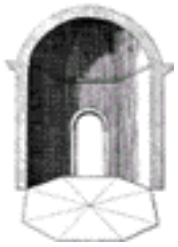
Until 1960, antithesis remained the fundamental position of the church toward modernity. Nevertheless, the way in which the church fought modernity changed profoundly. From his election



in 1846, Pius IX did indeed work diligently to restore Catholicism: the church went through a solid centralization process, the community of believers was incited to exhibit more intensive religious behaviour, devotional social life was further developed. Outside the religious sphere however, he would continue to propagate passivity, "*non componere*", i.e., a rejection of the modern world with which believers should not be and would not want to be associated. The Vatican's "*non expedit*" forced Catholic politicians in Italy following the unification of 1870 to stay out of Italian politics. It would become the model for all other `liberal' countries. With Leo XIII (1878-1903) this compulsive passivity outside the sphere of religion disappeared. Catholics were now urged to actively unite and to engage themselves in all kinds of domains. By then it had become clear that modern society was more than a revolutionary chaos that would soon collapse. Modernity proved to be more stable and more organized and, although not considered as a positive force, it seemed to be less devilish than the church had at first thought. Instead of a passive, total rejection, a lot of work was now put into the organization of a Catholic counter-movement which was to profoundly reshape modernity. Still in line with the idea of antithesis, the church entered into competition with secular modernity. In this way, a full-fledged and well-organized Catholic subculture, a Catholic `pillar' or `compartment' within society — in other words a counter-society — was established over the years, in anticipation of a future `Catholic modernity'. It resembles what the Socialist Labour Movement was doing around the same time. Not for nothing did many compare the `black International' of the Catholics with the `red International' of the socialists. Some decades later, the 1931 encyclical letter *Quadragesimo Anno* outlined a comprehensive programme for such social reforms. Its subtitle runs: "On the restoration of social order and its completion according to the law of the Gospel". And it concludes by summoning all Catholics to set up organizations and to fight for the realization of this programme (Pius XI, 1931).

Through this strategy, Catholicism managed in many states to remain in and even to advance to a position of social and political prominence. Nevertheless, the church continued to condemn modernity as if it were totally and wrongfully excluded. As time progressed, it became more and more difficult to keep up this stance. The post-war triumphs of Western democracy and consumer society made the church's discourse less and less plausible. The second Vatican Council, which took place during the glorious early 1960s, shaped a new image: the church as an interpreter of the `signs of the times', as a companion traveller and partner of modernity, as the guide in the modern world. No longer did the church condemn modernity. It now recognized freedom of religion and human rights as important assets. The church set out, albeit belatedly, to keep pace with modernity. For the latter had proved to be not so much a usurper as the church's forerunner. *Aggiornamento* became the key word, that is: bringing the church closer to modern times, adapting Catholicism to modernity. It was a reversal of its position during the 19th century. Instead of rejecting modernity as a dark and godless force, the church now sounded hopeful – in particular in its council document *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) - that the church and the good forces of the modern world united would be able to build a common house for all people.

This optimism did not last long. The latent and lingering crisis within the church during the pre-council period came to a full explosion in the 1960s. The liberalization, inaugurated by the Vatican Council, could not turn the tide. On the contrary, the radicalization that followed Vatican II - the demand for democracy within the church, for a revision of sexual morals, for a lifting of celibacy for Roman Catholic priests, etc. – all these became a thorn in the side of conservative believers. Confronted with rapid church decline, on the one hand, and with increasing internal tensions and confusion, on the other hand, the Vatican decided



to intervene in order to straighten things out. Doctrinal orthodoxy became important once again - *Humanae Vitae* (1968) can be seen as the turning point here. Conservative priests were appointed as bishops, sometimes against the expressed wish of the diocese. The cautious devolution process which Vatican II had started, was redirected toward more centralization. It seemed almost as if the centre no longer trusted its followers. The resulting restoration which Paul VI had begun, was continued and strengthened under John Paul II. In the same vein, the tone of church leaders talking about modernity once again turned more distant and negative. The wish to learn from others and particularly from the modern world has been taken back, stressing once more the point that the church's doctrine is right (cf. John Paul II in *Veritatis Splendor*, 1993:4 en 5). Instead of standing critically with the modern world, the church attacks its excesses (a comparison between *Populorum Progressio* from 1967 with *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* from 1987 – the latter is meant to update the former — illustrates the point).

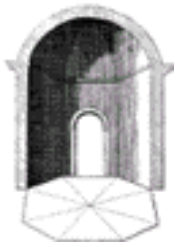
Let me summarize. I have added a fourth period to the three MacSweeney discerned: (1) from the French Revolution to 1878; (2) from 1878 (Leo XIII) to roughly the 1960s; (3) the 1960s, the years during and shortly after Vatican II; (4) the post-1968 period. These four periods correspond with the four positions the Catholic church adopted vis-à-vis modernity: (1) total rejection of a licentious and impermanent disorder; (2) competition against a hostile order; (3) alliance; (4) alternative voice. These, in turn, are bound up with four self-images of the church: (1) victim of temporary, revolutionary agitation; (2) counterpower fighting a fearsome enemy; (3) partnership with modernity; (4) embattled minority group. These also link with the mirror images of how the church perceived modernity: (1) sinful interruption; (2) secular power; (3) partner; (4) social context hostile to the church.

In general it seems that the church, with an exception for the optimistic early 1960s, has always encountered modernity with distrust and hostility. In the eyes of the Catholic church, religion and modernity do not seem to go together well. The antithesis and the tensions between them have always been a matter of prime importance. Before 1960 these were interpreted in a more personal way: in the opinion of the church, the supporters of modernity and its new order harboured evil intentions toward the church. After the 1960s a more structural explanation came to the fore, one that was in fact much more pessimistic: the modern world may well be the world in which all of us live, but its affluence, its passion for fast and shallow entertainment, and its cynicism do not urge us toward a deepening of religious insights and experiences. The whole evolution throughout these four phases illustrates to what extent the power of the church has shrunk over the last two centuries: once the powerful ally of the ruling elite, now a minority church. And, conversely, it shows to what extent modernity has won respect: once an uncertain vision of future times propagated by innovators, now the inescapable driving force that shapes our life and social environment alike.

Diagram 1:

Timeline with relations between Church and modernity

Period	RC view of modernity	RC attitude towards modernity	self-image of RC church
1789-1878	temporary disorder	rejection	victim of revol. agitation
1878-1962	hostile order	competition	counterpower
1962-1968	partner	cooperation	partner
1968-	irreligious context	countervoice	embattled minority



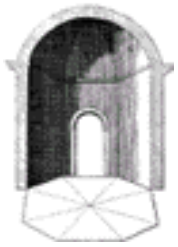
Modernity and modernization of Catholicism

We have reviewed how the Catholic church adapted an attitude based predominantly upon suspicion and rejection of modernity. The outside world also saw an irresolvable tension or antithesis between Catholicism and modernity and, more generally, between religion and modernity.

Before 1960, at the time of polarization, anti-clerical groups often perceived religion as something doomed to disappear because it was said to be a relic dating back to pre-modern times. It is true that this polarization, and with it, the denunciation of religion as such, ebbed away after 1960. But then, the rapid decline of the church, especially in Europe, evoked in a new way the view that there was indeed an unbridgeable gap between religion and modernity. Confronted with the spectacular fall in church membership and church attendance, the structural problems modernity had created for religion, were pointed to: functional differentiation, the anonymity of mass society and rationalization were considered to constitute crucial elements in a process of modernization that inevatibly leads to the marginalization of religion (for a summary see Wallis, Bruce, 1992). Although this is an important theme, I do not want to explore the problem of secularization any further here (Hellemans, 1998 gives a preliminary exploration).

Since the 1990s, new developments have enticed me to approach the issue of religion versus modernity from a different angle and to attempt to overcome the view which stresses the inherent opposition between them. One of these developments is the insight that secularization theory gives only one side of the picture, the decline side. Secularization has certainly led to a spectacular fall in membership of the larger churches, but it has not done away with churches and even less with religion. In this modern secular world, how is religious life and church life still possible? What forms do they take? These are fundamental questions. Furthermore, religion and the churches — even the Catholic church — seem to be losing the negative connotations that they have carried over the past two centuries: being old, obsolete, outdated. On the contrary, there are some indications — to give two examples, the growing interest for mysticism and the success of the Catholic World Youth Days — that there is renewed interest in, and a more positive attitude toward religion. Conversely, modernity is losing some of its normative drive and attractiveness. The dangers related to modernity — intensified warfare, environmental pollution, stress and uncertainty — are nowadays as obvious as its advantages (cf. post-modernism). If religion still has a future, and if modernity is losing the mythical splendour that surrounded it in the 1960s, then the antithetical discourse loses its plausibility.

In other words, the times in which we live force us to give up our conception of an antithesis between religion and modernity. Instead of opposing religion and modernity, I would like to argue in favour of a close interaction between the two. This new approach must however give up the conceptual imagery of religion and modernity as being two independent, external and equivalent entities. From being an illegitimate temporary interval or — from a different perspective — a half-baked social ideal, modernity has risen to become the universal context, the matrix in which all forms of social life exist, including religious life. It is clear now that religion and the much reduced churches operate within the context of modernity. This implies that modernity has to be circumscribed more broadly as a generic, encompassing concept pertaining to structural characteristics such as industrialized money economies, state-organized political systems, public standardized education, functional differentiation (Luhmann, 1992). Thus modernity, the `present-day civilization' so abhorred by Pius IX, turned out to be less an external adversary that could be beaten, than the broad context in which Catholicism existed from the French Revolution onward. This is an intellectual perspective that would have been difficult to imagine in the Catholic world some 100

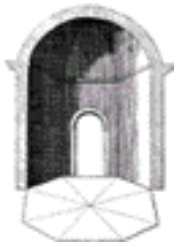


years ago. In fact it is a view which implies the existence of our present world, of a victorious modernity and of churches with strongly diminished backing and membership.

This view interprets religion, and by implication Catholicism, no longer as opposed to modernity, but as an evolving part of a likewise evolving modernity. Religions in modernity should therefore be considered as thoroughly modern. This may at first sight seem to be a merely semantic exercise: we define religions as being modern. To a certain extent this is true, but that is not the point. What is essential is the opening of a new research perspective, the invitation to understand the modernity of religions in modernity. Instead of defining the distinctive features of a religion — Catholicism for instance — in opposition to an idealized version of modernity, such as tradition versus change or God versus secularism, we are now spurred on to closely examine the various ways in which religions and modernity interact, how religions permanently and creatively respond to the threats and opportunities to the models and ideas, to the movements and developments generated in and by modern society. It is all very similar to individual people and the ways in which they interact with the world in which they live. Through their constant activity within the framework of modern society, religions and the churches modernize themselves as well. It makes the post-1800 religions, notwithstanding their references to the past and their aversion to modernity, structurally and ideologically very different from their pre-modern manifestations. Thus our research must now focus on the process of modernization within religions, a notion which until very recently seemed to be nothing less than a contradiction in terms (Hellemans, 1997).

For the study of Catholicism, this approach promises to be very fruitful. Catholicism was unequalled in its stubborn opposition to modernity, but at the same time it is one of the most successful churches in modernity. The 18th century Ancien Régime church was state-allied and federated. In the 19th century, it was turned into a state independent, centralized mass organization, capable of integrating and mobilizing large sections of the population. In fact, the church was the first non-state mass organization of modernity, long before other mass organizations made headway after 1880. Under Leo XIII and his successors, this mass organizational model was extended to more secular areas and so the many large Catholic lay organizations came into being (professional organizations, educational and charitable organizations, cultural and recreational organizations, even trade unions and political parties). Internally this caused a lot of friction, for instance between bishops and prominent members of lay organizations, but at the same time it gave the Catholic church unprecedented power and influence. Another example of religious modernization with great effect is its missionary work. The Catholic church allied itself, from early on, with the project of colonization. Driven by a colonial, `civilizing' spirit and supported by its well-organized structure, its manpower and its entrepreneurial spirit, its missionary work in the non-Western world reached its apogee in the 19th and early 20th century. It made the Catholic church the world's largest single religious community. Other aspects of 19th-century and early 20th-century Catholicism, such as the rise of neo-Scholasticism (Thibault, 1972) or neo-Gothic art and architecture (De Maeyer, Verpoest, 2000), the propagation of Gregorian Chant or the development of social doctrine (Hellemans, 2000), can equally be interpreted as successful manifestations of religious modernization.

What is important in all of this is that modernization and modern are no longer on a par with liberal or progressive. Conservatives and even people with reactionary ideas are no less modern than liberals and progressives. They too take part in modernity, although their appreciation and evaluation of it differ fundamentally from that of their liberal adversaries. This also applies to the Catholic church: it is both an integral part of



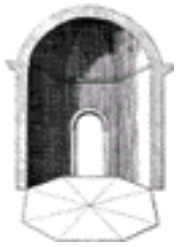
modernity and yet very critically disposed toward it. One might say that the Catholic church over the past two centuries, with the exception of the Vatican II period, has been modernizing while maintaining an anti-modernist stance. Anti-modernist modernization is indeed the label that, in my view, best captures the double and ambiguous `performance' of Catholicism in the modern world: objectively rooted in, and yet subjectively stubbornly resisting modernity.

Present and future situations

How does this approach, which highlights the modernity and continuous religious modernization of Catholicism, help us to understand the present situation of the Catholic church?

First, it puts into perspective the opposition between progressives and conservatives. It is not my intention to deny the differences between the two. Present church policy, correctly in my view, is said to be conservative. The differences with the liberal reform movement during and immediately following the second Vatican Council are clear: re-centralization from Rome, emphasis on Catholic doctrine and the specific identity of the church — with connotations pointing back to the time-honoured `*nulla salus extra ecclesiam*' — the stream of beatifications and canonizations, etc. From a progressive point of view this type of conservatism is doomed in advance because it is thought to be in opposition with `modernity'. This thesis I will dispute. Modernity leaves room for many strategies. The labels `progressive' and `conservative' summarize the two main directions in an oversimplified way. One cannot exclude *a priori* the success of anti-modernistic modernization: it is precisely the prosperity of the church before 1960 which proves to many conservatives the correctness of their strategy. But neither should one accept literally the conservatives' claim that only they guarantee continuity with the past and that they do no more than transmit orthodoxy in an undamaged way. They obscure the impact of the processes of religious modernization which are constantly at work. The past never comes back. Post-1800 Catholicism is very different from pre-1800 Catholicism. In the same sense pre-1960 Catholicism is also passé. What is developing now is not a rebirth of a former type of Catholicism, but a new type of Catholicism. The outlines and challenges of this new Catholicism need to be discovered and made more explicit. The religious modernization perspective seems to be very suitable for this purpose because it focuses on the permanent and multifaceted `production' of religion, on the `making' of religion which is always in the present even when it harks back to the past. Whether this new Catholicism will be conservative or progressive in nature is, analytically speaking, a question of secondary importance.

What does it mean to talk about a new type of Catholicism? I already discerned four phases of Catholicism. This, however, was not completely correct because these phases are not alike. The first and the second phase dovetail very tightly. In fact they form one larger period, namely ultramontane mass Catholicism. The third phase was until recently — i.e., from Vatican II to the 1980s — considered to be a definitive new period (see McSweeney, 1980 and Coleman, 1978). It now seems to have been a mere transitional phase, an in-between stage, which lasted for only a limited number of years, two decades at the most. This new, coarser periodization into two periods ties up with the more recent historical and sociological literature which distinguishes the first, industrial modernity from a second, post-industrial, reflexive modernity (see, particularly, Beck, 1986). The 1960s again mark the cut-off line. Many things have changed in these years and thereafter: globalization of the economy, the end of `old' politics and decolonization, growing individualization, new ways of life, etc. Modernity as a whole enters into a new period. Precisely what this will look like, is hard to tell. The structures have so far not stabilized.



The evolution of Catholicism shows, in my opinion, a similar development. The ultramontane form of mass Catholicism developed in response to industrial modernity. It took several decades, from the French Revolution to about 1850, before the basic structures of this new church formation found a stable shape: the centralized church, led from Rome, socializing and mobilizing the great mass of followers under firm clerical leadership. One can, as we did, distinguish various sub-formations over this long period. The first phase, under Pius IX, coincides with the days of liberal capitalism. The second phase, starting with Leo XIII, where organized Catholicism was to expand into the secular domain, coincides with organized capitalism. In the past decades we have been witnessing the demolition both of this Western-based, organized capitalism (Offe, 1985) and of ultramontane mass Catholicism. The disintegration of these once stable structures — and patterns of thought — has led to an uncountable number of experiments and searches in various directions. We cannot say that this has already issued in a new, stable order. As far as religion is concerned, this will only be the case once the process of secularization has been completed. Only then will it be clear how many people the churches will still be able to reach and which structures are viable (for instance, will it still be possible for a priestly type of church to be adequately manned?). So we have to be careful. But I also think that we have moved far enough into the transition period so that some of the major outlines of the new religious formation are becoming visible.

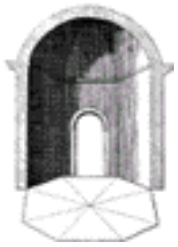
I would like to explore some of the future scenarios. In my opinion, the secularization over the last decades in the West is an irreversible fact. The distinction between religion in general — all forms of activity aimed at linking immanence with transcendence — and the churches — all forms of organized religion — is my starting point. The distinction is necessary because, definitely after 1960, many religious activities took place outside the larger churches (consider, for example, the role of New-Age book shops). The future of the churches may go in two different directions: they may go on playing a vital role, be it as smaller churches or denominations or they may sink into marginality. Something similar applies to religion as a whole: either it continues to attract a large number of people or it shrinks into insignificance. Combined into a matrix this gives four possible scenarios for the future.

Diagram 2:
Scenarios stating the future of religion and the churches

-	Religion	+
(1) a-religious society		(3) invisible religion church(es)
(2) residue churches		(4) thriving churches

Scenario 1 anticipates continuing decline of the churches and a diminishing interest in religious matters. The final result will be an a-religious society without churches or with micro churches as moribund reminders of present-day large churches. Scenario 2 also demonstrates a lack of interest in religion. Yet some small but vigorous churches remain active. These will be small residue churches and they will stubbornly and provocatively continue to fight the a-religious society in which they have to operate. Expressed in negative terms, we could call this the sect scenario. In scenario 3 the large churches gradually decline, but the interest for a (churchless) religion stays alive. The result would be a barely institutionalized `invisible religion' (Luckmann, 1967). `New Age' is an example of this tendency. Scenario 4 provides a future image of a lively religious field in which the (now smaller) churches continue to play a key role. The churches in this scenario stay vigorous and know how to capitalize on the vague and fluctuating religious needs of the people.

The diagram cannot tell us what will happen in reality. It is an analytical blueprint with various possible scenarios. We have to be aware of the fact that each religious constellation, because of the nature of its construction and its roots in society,



contains some fundamental tensions. At the time of organized confessionalism, the Catholic variant of which was ultramontane mass Catholicism, the polarization between the organized confessional and anti-clericalist blocks was one of these inherent, irreconcilable tensions. Our analytical diagram points toward a new tension, namely between the churches as organized forms of religion and a detached public. If we look at scenarios 2 and 4, we can grasp this tension in the opposition between the residue and the thriving churches scenarios. In the previous religious formation, the churches had managed to closely involve believers in the churches and to turn them into a militant group of followers. After 1960, due to increased individualization, that trend reversed. People, even church members, identify themselves less with `their' church. Apart from church leaders and a small core group of fervent adherents, almost everyone else, including active church members, has turned into full or partial outsiders. The once broad and obedient following has become a detached, critical public. This raises the question as to how, and to what extent the public can still be reached. The lesser the public's religious interests, the more likely it is that the residue church scenario will come about. Likewise, the more church leaders think that interest is lacking and consequently behave accordingly, the more likely the residue church scenario will be. This is what is commonly referred to as a `self fulfilling prophecy'. Deciding which policy to pursue — a `holy residue' policy or a `general public' policy — will therefore constitute an important area of tension.

This may be further accentuated if scenario 3, that of an `invisible religion', is taken into consideration. Opinion polls repeatedly show that a lot of people claim to believe in God, life after death, and other religious postulates, while being unchurched. In 1990 70% of all Europeans claimed to believe in God whereas `only' 39% reported going to church at least once a month (Davie, 1999: 69-70). Grace Davie labels this phenomenon `believing without belonging'. According to Davie, these people believe, but the additional step toward church membership and participation is not taken. The question remains how literally these belief statements are to be taken. Do these non-churched people really believe in God and the other topics, or do they merely indicate that they would like to believe, not knowing precisely what to believe in? If so, they have expressed not so much a belief, i.e. the echo of an institutionalized belief, but rather a longing for religion without specification. Viewed from this perspective, the `invisible religion' scenario does not refer to people who privately adhere to a specific form of faith and religious experiences. Rather, it records a condition in which people long for religion in a very vague and desultory way without being able to make this longing more explicit and experience it in reality. In that case scenario 3 does not refer to `believing without belonging', but rather to `longing without belonging'. Admittedly, this is a gloomy interpretation for the churches. It is also one that needs further empirical foundations. But if that line of reasoning is correct, it underlines how difficult it will be in the future for the churches to reach a population which might be vaguely interested in religious matters.

Let us now return to the more specific question of what contours the new form of Catholicism will adopt. I circumscribe it provisionally as a multifaceted, choice Catholicism. To enable a quick comparison, I will contrast the new church formation with the previous one: ultramontane mass Catholicism.

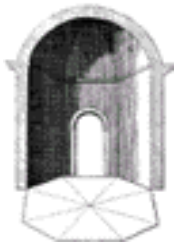


Diagram 3:

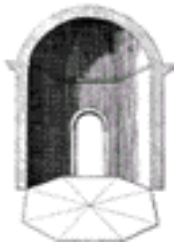
Ultramontane Mass Catholicism	*Multifaceted Choice Catholicism*
Italo-Western world church	globalized, multicultural world church
Roman-homogenizing	dualization between Roman-oriented top tives and the relatively autonomous grass roots level
intensive socialization	smaller choice church versus a vaguely inter-
of native Catholics	ested public
organized sub-society	polarization between the factions
church within a wider society	competing churches in a turbulent religious field

The most fundamental characteristic in my opinion seems to be that the Catholic church in the Western world, like the other great churches, is turning into a minority and choice church. Secularization in the second half of the 20th century has put an end to the integration of large parts of the population into the Catholic church, thereby also putting an end to the polarization between clericalist and anti-clericalist factions. The Catholic church now turns into a choice church for believers who consciously make a choice in its favour. Every now and then segments of the wider public will seek limited contacts with the church in order to emphasize crucial individual transitions such as marriage and death or to come to terms with special collective events such as the death of princess Diana, the Estonia accident or the murders of innocent children. Moreover, in contrast with the past, the Catholic church is now one of many religious actors in a competitive religious field. This does not mean that the Catholic church will sink away. As large businesses and political parties have shown in the economic and political arenas, large organizations can survive very well in a competitive environment. They have a wealth of resources at their disposal which enable them to cope with unprecedented and radically new situations. The most difficult matter to give an opinion on is the future internal structure of the Catholic church. At this moment there is a gap between the Rome-oriented executive staff and the largely autonomous church life in the parishes. It is likely that a *modus vivendi* will be worked out between unity at the top and diversity in the lower regions of a multicultural world church. How this relationship is shaped will depend on strategic policy choices such as the one between orthodoxy and liberalization. The most likely outcome will be an oscillation between the two options.

Conclusion:
Is this the end of the Catholic intellectual?

I have focused my attention on the broad characterization of the relationship between Catholicism and modernity. More important than the opposition between the two is, in my opinion, the way in which Catholicism is embedded in modernity. We have to scrutinize closely the ongoing processes of religious modernization and their enshrinement in changing church structures. The previous two centuries of Catholicism and modernity can then be described as the formation and disintegration of one church formation (i.e., ultramontane mass Catholicism) and later, over the last decades, as the shaping of an entirely new church formation (i.e., multifaceted choice Catholicism). This is the framework within which Catholic intellectuals have been and are still working.

Looking at the issue from this perspective, the label `Catholic intellectual' seems strongly linked with the church formation of ultramontane mass Catholicism. Catholicism was at that time the basis upon which an entire sub-society was built. Every true Catholic was supposed to live his life within the Catholic fold under the active guidance of the church. He was also expected, if necessary, to stand up for his church, its interests and projects. This was certainly the case for Catholic intellectuals. As representatives of a dubious category, the leaders of the church distrusted them. At the same time, however, they were important as defenders of the Catholic faith and worldview against their secular and protestant colleagues. The adjective `Catholic' was clearly more important than the noun `intellectual'. Consequently, Catholic intellectuals



who left a permanent mark in the domain of the social sciences and literature are rare. In the domain of Catholic intellectual traditions things went better because here the focus was less on strong individual performances and more on intellectual school building. This was better suited to Catholicism, with its long-standing emphasis on the collectivity and on organizations. Thus, many Catholic universities were founded in the period of ultramontane mass Catholicism and a number of influential traditions such as neo-Thomistic theology, Catholic social doctrine, Catholic sociology, etc., came into being.

Because they were so closely interwoven with ultramontane mass Catholicism, both the `Catholic intellectual' and the `Catholic intellectual tradition' ran into major problems after 1960. In general, when a social formation dissolves, there are three possible types of discourse: either one focuses on continuity; or one highlights the end; or, as a type of middle course, one stresses the transformation process. The deep rift between the old and the new form of Catholicism makes a discourse of sheer continuity less plausible — consider how the church moved from a position of supremacy to being a minority and choice church. More convincing is the type of discourse that focuses on the end of the Catholic intellectual and intellectual traditions. The Catholic intellectual, reasoning under the supervision of and for the church, has virtually disappeared. This holds true even for Catholic theologians. The reason is simple: because the Catholic church is no longer the core of an entire sub-society, it can no longer constitute the basic social and intellectual framework for its intellectuals.

Likewise many Catholic traditions have disappeared. The once so dominant neo-Thomistic school finds every now and then a faint echo in a Papal encyclical letter, but mostly it has become the object of study for historical theologians. Catholic sociology disappeared altogether. Catholic social doctrine — now called social teaching — has better prospects for survival and is a possible candidate for the third type of discourse, the transformation discourse (McHugh, Verstraeten, 2000). There is a fair chance that even in the future there will still be some sort of Catholic intellectuals. At the moment we cannot answer the question how many and how important they will be. In any case, leaving aside a small number of paid officials, the church will no longer be in any position to control these intellectuals. They will reflect on the church and think with the church. Undoubtedly, some Catholic traditions will also continue to live on and new ones will emerge. Traditions which stand close to the core tasks of the church such as Catholic social teaching, or liturgical and mystical traditions, have the best chances of being passed down. In any event, the church can no longer claim to be the intellectual centre of an entire world or sub-society. It can only hope — and do the best it can — to constitute an attractive meeting point for intellectuals who are sensitive to religious matters. The condition, however, is that the church welcomes the sincere, independent, probing research of intellectuals. In other words, the condition is that the church manages to escape the rigorous realization of the sect scenario.

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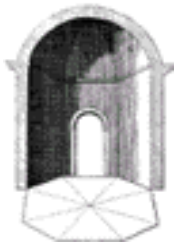

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